

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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FM AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
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C O N F I D E N T I A L ALGIERS 1259

CINCEUR FOR POLAD

E. O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MILI, AG, SU
SUBJ: SOVIET SHIP VISIT TO ALGIERS

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1. APRIL 8-13 VISIT BY THREE SOVIET NAVAL VESSELS TO ALGIERS (REF-
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TELS) ENDED ON SCHEDULE APRIL 13. VISIT RECEIVED PROMINENT, BUT NOT
EXTENSIVE, OFFICIAL MEDIA COVERAGE AND WENT SMOOTHLY AS NEARLY AS
WE CAN TELL. ACCORDING TO PRESS, ADMIRAL RYABINSKY LAID WREATH AT
MARTYRS' TOMB IN ALGIERS AND VISITED SOCIALIST VILLAGE IN BLIDA
WILAYA (PROVINCE) NEAR ALGIERS. ADMIRAL ALSO TOURED INDUSTRIAL VEH-
ICLE FACTORY AT ROUBA OUTSIDE ALGIERS AND NAVAL TRAINING SCHOOL
AT BORDJ EL-BAHRI NEAR CAPITAL.

2. VISIT EVEN PRODUCED ONE HUMAN INTEREST STORY IN WHICH SOVIET LIEUTENANT OLEG VICHNEVSKI, WITH AID OF ALGERIAN PASSERBY, SAVED SIX YEAR OLD ALGERIAN CHILD WHO FELL INTO WATER ALONGSIDE DESTROYER SMELY. BOTH VICHNEVSKI AND ALGERIAN JUMPED INTO HARBOR TO RESCUE CHILD.

3. DCM REPORTS FOLLOWING OBSERVATIONS FROM HIS ATTENDANCE AT APRIL 12 RECEPTION FOR ALGERIANS AND DIPLOMATIC CORPS ABOARD MOSKVA:

A. ADMIRAL RYABINSKY WORE REAR ADMIRAL'S (CONTRE AMIRAL) UNIFORM DEVICES, I.E. ONE BROAD AND ONE NARROW STRIPE ON SLEEVE. IN BRIEF CONVERSATION, ADMIRAL'S INTERPRETER CONFIRMED PRESS REPORTS THAT RYABINSKY WAS COMMANDING SOVMEDFLT.

B. NO OTHER FLAG-RANK SOVIET OFFICER WAS IN EVIDENCE DURING RECEPTION (OR AT ANY OTHER TIME AS FAR AS WE KNOW).

C. DURING RECEPTION, TWO "HORMONE" KA-25 HELICOPTERS WERE PARKED ON MOSKVA'S FLIGHT DECK.

D. RECEPTION TOOK PLACE IN WHAT APPEARED TO BE A HANGAR IMMEDIATELY FORWARD OF, AND ON SAME LEVEL WITH, FLIGHT DECK. FORWARD PORTION OF THIS HANGAR CURTAINED OFF, AND DCM COULD NOT SEE WHETHER THERE WAS ELEVATOR IN THIS AREA.

E. ACCORDING TO SOVIET MILITARY ATTACHE IN ALGIERS, MOSKVA'S COMPLEMENT IS 800, OF WHO 100 ARE OFFICERS. SHIP'S PILOTS ARE AMONG THE 100 OFFICERS.

4. CLOSE OBSERVATION OF ARMAMENT OF ANY OF SHIPS WAS NOT POSSIBLE.
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SIBLE.

5. IN CONTRAST WITH 1974 SOVIET SHIP VISIT, MILITARY ATTACHES ASSIGNED HERE WERE NOT GIVEN SPECIAL TOUR OF MOSKVA. ALGERIAN VIP'S APPARENTLY WERE.

6 IN OPINION OF FRENCH MILATT, ALGERIANS WERE FORCED TO GIVE VISIT CONSIDERABLY MORE IMPORTANCE THAN 1974 VISIT ON SEVERAL LEVELS:

A. THEY AGREED TO INCLUSION OF MORE HEAVILY ARMED SHIPS IN SQUADRON;

B. THEY GAVE SHIPS MUCH BETTER BERTHS;

C. THEY ALLOWED SOVIETS TO CORDON OFF AREA OF ALGIERS HARBOR, WHERE SOVIET SHIPS BERTHED. SOVIET SMALL CRAFT DENIED ACCESS TO THIS AREA TO ALGERIAN AND OTHER VESSELS;

D. THEY GAVE RYABINSKY OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE POLITICAL STATEMENTS AT PRESS CONFERENCE;

E. THEY GAVE VISIT MUCH BETTER MEDIA COVERAGE THAN WAS CASE IN 1974;

F. THEY ATTENDED FINAL SOVIET RECEPTION ON BOARD MOSKVA AT HIGH LEVEL, WITH ONE MINISTER (ZERGUINI OF PTT), MINDEF SECY GEN LATRECHE, AND OTHER REGIME FIGURES IN ATTENDANCE.

7. GREATER PROMINENCE OF 1978 VISIT ATTRIBUTABLE, IN VIEW OF FRENCH MILATT, TO SOVIET LEVERAGE MADE POSSIBLE BY GREATER ALGERIAN NEED FOR EQUIPMENT AND AMMUNITION AS CONFRONTATION WITH MOROCCO HAS ESCALATED. FRENCH MILATT BELIEVES SOVIETS ARE STILL AFTER NAVAL FACILITIES AT ANNABA AND MERS EL KEBIR AND SOME FROM OF AIR FACILITIES NEAR CONSTANTINE. ALGERIANS, FACED WITH GROWING PRESSURE FOR SUCH FACILITIES, BUT DETERMINED TO REMAIN AS INDEPENDENT AS THEY CAN, HAVE TAKEN RELATIVELY EASY STEP OF PERMITTING SHIP VISIT ON GRADER SCALE THAN IN 1974.

8. COMMENT: FRENCH HAVE RECENTLY BEEN PLAYING UP IDEA OF GREATER ALGERIAN COOPERATION WITH SOVIETS IN ALL FIELDS. THIS MAY OR MAY NOT BE TRUE, BUT WE DO NOT SEE LATEST SHIP VISIT AS EVIDENCE OF CLOSER MILITARY RELATIONSHIP.
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